Marshfield was the site for MEUW’s 94th Annual Conference held May 15–17. Attendees from 37 municipal utilities were on hand to hear presentations on a number of current economic, legislative, and technology trends, including potential impacts and opportunities associated with artificial intelligence and small nuclear installments. Interactive sessions gave participants the opportunity to learn about legislative and regulatory hot topics, and to provide insights to identify emerging priorities MEUW can address.

Nearly 100 registrants took part in the Annual Conference, held at Hotel Marshfield. MEUW President and CEO Tim Heinrich kicked off the event, sharing that MEUW will be holding a forward-looking strategy session in August. “District Dialogue” luncheons will also be held in various locations throughout the state to encourage members to get together, stay informed, and share what’s important to them.

Tom Still from the Wisconsin Technology Council then shared his insights on economic trends to watch in Wisconsin, followed by an interesting presentation about national legislative updates from Michael Nolan, President of MJN Consulting based in Washington, D.C. Paul Zummo, Director of Research and Development from American Public Power Association (APPA) shared current areas of focus around emerging technology trends in the utility industry, including in renewable generation, low emission resources, and carbon capture, and storage.

Impacts and opportunities associated with artificial intelligence (AI) were next on the agenda, presented by Dr. Greg Cisewski, Dean of the School of Agricultural Science, Utilities and Transportation at Northcentral Technical College. He discussed potential AI applications such as smart grid management, predictive maintenance, load forecasting, and automated metering and billing.

Breakout sessions gave smaller groups a chance to ask questions and learn about legislative and regulatory hot topics and their potential impact on municipal electric utilities, as well as offering their insights to aid in MEUW’s future-looking strategy session.

Dairyland Power Cooperative’s (DPC) Vice President of Generation Jeremy Browning then shared DPC’s experience with small modular nuclear reactors, discussing the value proposition, siting considerations, and opportunities to support and shape the policy and legislative landscape.

The Conference closed with an energetic presentation from Brenda Clark Hamilton, explaining research into how

Above: Political consultant Michael Nolan shared his insights about happenings in the nation’s capital. At right: Attendees took part in small-group sessions, including one focused on MEUW’s strategic plan. The lunchtime program included the presentation of safety awards and individual honors.

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to foster genuine confidence in yourself and excellence in your life. Brenda helped attendees identify different lenses each of us see things through that have daily impacts on our demeanor and relationships.

If you did not attend the conference and are interested in receiving presentation slides, please email office@meuw.org to request them.

MEUW held its 94th Annual Conference in May, celebrating another year of achievements by municipal utilities and looking ahead. The gathering included an Awards Ceremony to recognize individuals whose efforts contribute to public power. (1) Joe Adler, a journeyman lineman at Stoughton Utilities, was among three recipients honored with the Excellence in Linework Award that celebrates individuals who consistently demonstrate dedication to their profession as a lineman. Kaukauna’s Collin Hass and Stoughton’s Ryan Jefferson also received the award this year. (A full list of those honored is available [here](#)). (2) Attendees also had a chance to hear from a panel of government affairs leaders active in the process of educating lawmakers. MEUW’s Tyler Vorpagel facilitated the discussion. (3) APPA’s Paul Zummo highlighted emerging technology trends in the utility industry, including energy storage.

Marshfield Utilities (MU) served as an excellent “host utility” for the 94th Annual Conference. The MU team welcomed conference attendees to tour their new facility, including the 55,000 square-foot garage, which was also the venue for networking during the conference Welcome Reception (sponsored by Wisconsin Utility Suppliers Association). Attendees networked and played “yard games” — and even participated in an axe-throwing competition! MU General Manager Nicolas Kumm and his team generously shared their space and provided MEUW members and their guests with a warm welcome to Marshfield.

The 94th annual gathering of public power leaders held May 15-17 in Marshfield was made possible, in part, thanks to the support of these sponsors:

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The association presented 43 member utilities with Safety Achievement Awards for their 2023 safety performance. Each was honored at a ceremony held during with the 94th Annual Conference in Marshfield on May 16.

The MEUW Safety Achievement Award was created to recognize safety performance and to encourage safety activities by member utilities. Awards are given based on voluntary reporting. Utilities receive recognition for their dedication to employees’ on-the-job focus: following safety rules, using safe work practices, and watching out for one another. The metrics are designed to identify leading indicators of safety performance, rather than lagging indicators. MEUW has been presenting safety awards since 1999.

This award also acknowledges the commitment of utility management and governing boards to creating an environment that supports safe operations. This includes ensuring employees have the equipment needed to do their jobs safely, and training to maintain or improve skills. Award recipients are placed into one of three categories (gold, silver, or bronze) based on scoring against key criteria that promote a strong safety culture.

The association presented member utilities with Safety Achievement Awards at the Annual Conference. Accepting on behalf of their utility were: Front row; from left — Brian Dellemann (Two Rivers), Mike Reynolds (Boscobel), Scott Gald (Richland Center), Rick Wicklund (Sun Prairie), Todd Wiener (Wisconsin Rapids); Second row — Dave Tichinel (Clintonville), Isaac Pooler (Trempealeau), George Morrissey (Cuba City), Nick Gahlman (Juneau), Dalton Hiley (Columbus), Jordan Peichel (Cumberland), Kerrird Lindroth (Evansville), Nicolas Kummi (Marshfield); Back row — Steve Brooks (Waupun), Bruce Gomm (Shawano), Jason Bessette (New London), Troy Adams (Manitowoc), Brian Carroll (Gresham), Jill Weiss (Stoughton), Ryan Roehrenborn (Plymouth), Mike Sanborn (Eagle River), Neil Jack (Kaukauna), Brian Rhodes (Hartford), Troy Wardell (Muscooda), Melanie Krause (Menasha), Jimmy Smith (Rice Lake), Tim Herlitzka (Waunakee)
Waterloo: A small town with big surprises

Located in the northwest corner of Jefferson County, Waterloo is nestled amid rolling hills, lush farmland, and the winding Maunesha River. It is the proud home of Van Holten Pickles, Trek Bicycle Corp., and one of oldest wooden carousels still in operation today. Visitors are enticed to explore Waterloo when they first see the town’s historic water tower, which is covered with whimsical paintings of the carousel.

Waterloo was established as a Village in 1859 and became a city in 1962.

While the carousel may be the gem of the city, Waterloo Utilities is the driving force behind the community’s businesses and residents. It has been providing electric, water, and wastewater services for its 3,500 residents since 1908.

“Waterloo enjoys a small-town atmosphere, but we still have many big-city amenities,” said Barry Sorenson, Superintendent of Waterloo Utilities. “Waterloo is in a great location — only about 25 miles from Madison and 60 from Milwaukee.”

The electric utility serves approximately 1,650 residential customers and 300 commercial customers throughout its four-square-mile territory. A team of 12 proudly operates the three utilities; four are dedicated to the electric utility. “We cross-train all employees, so they can jump in when necessary wherever help is needed.” Sorenson started his career with Waterloo Utilities as a lineworker in 1996, became line foreman in 2006, and was promoted to superintendent in 2015.

“It’s a pleasure working for the community,” Sorenson said. “We have great people that do a great job and take pride in what they do every day.”

Business is thriving in Waterloo

A wide range of businesses are headquartered in Waterloo. “We are fortunate to have large, world-class companies as well as thriving small businesses… and everything in between,” Sorenson said.

Waterloo Utilities’ largest electric customers are Trek and Van Holten Pickles. Van Holten moved to Waterloo from Milwaukee in 1956, and its pickles now stand alone in the industry — literally. Each pickle is sold separately in its own pouch with flavored brine and catchy names such as “Hot Mama” and “Garlic Gus.” Trek’s U.S. operations have been headquartered in Waterloo since its founding nearly 40 years ago.

“Trek is one of our most well-known customers,” Sorenson said. While most of Trek’s manufacturing operations have moved overseas, they still produce their higher-end bikes in Waterloo. “You’re likely to pass cyclists on Trek bicycles heading to their main office every morning, which is fun to see.”

Trek had made it their priority to reduce their carbon footprint and that, in turn, has been good for the community overall, Sorenson noted.

A leader in green power sales

In 2023, Waterloo Utilities received national recognition from the Department of Energy National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) for its participation in renewable energy programs. Waterloo Utilities received second place in the nation on the list for its green power sales rate. The green power sales rate compares the ratio of a utility’s renewable energy sales to total sales.

In 2023, renewable energy accounted for 17% of Waterloo Utilities’ electric sales.

“Our customers are leaders when it comes to renewable energy programs,” said Sorenson. “It is clear that accessible, renewable energy is more important than ever for our commercial customers — most notably Trek — but also for our residents.”

Utility improvements

In the last few years, Waterloo Utilities has continued to make improvements to its facilities and operations. “We are always in the continuous improvement mode,” Sorenson said. “Always looking to make things better for our customers and neighbors.”

In 2022, Waterloo Utilities, which is a member of WPPI Energy, finished construction of a new substation so it could directly connect to ATC’s lines. “This project was important not just to

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solving the immediate energy needs in this area, but also to increasing the overall reliability of service for all customers in Waterloo and the surrounding communities,” Sorenson said.

The electric crew also completed two significant overhead-to-underground projects in 2023, conducted transformer maintenance, and replaced poles throughout town.

In May 2023, the sewer utility started a massive 800-day, $28 million upgrade of its wastewater treatment plant to meet Department of Natural Resources standards and ensure safe, clean water is returned to the river. Sorenson said that construction is going well, and careful planning has ensured plant operations are not interrupted during the upgrade.

**Waterloo is a destination**

Waterloo offers plenty of reasons to stop and stay for a while, and not just drive through on the way to Milwaukee or Madison. “There is a lot for people to do and see in Waterloo,” Sorenson said.

The city’s Fireman’s Park hosts community events, and has disc golf, walking trails, and a baseball field. Waterloo Utilities recently replaced the diamond light controls at the baseball field, so spectators can better enjoy night games.

The park is also home to the carousel, which was built by the C.W. Parker Amusement Company and owned by the Curtis Brother Carnival until 1925 when Waterloo purchased it. It had to undergo major renovations after experiencing flood damage in 2008 but is still going strong today.

Once a year, Waterloo holds its Weiner and Sauerkraut Day. This year’s event, which is scheduled for Sept. 14, will mark its 64th anniversary. Originally, the celebration showcased sauerkraut produced by Van Holten. While Van Holten no longer produces sauerkraut, the annual festival continues and now includes a large variety of vendors, a wiener dog parade, musical entertainment, raffle prizes, games, contests, and wiener and kraut sandwiches!

“I’m proud to be a part of Waterloo Utilities,” Sorenson said. “We strive to be highly reliable, affordable, environmentally friendly, and innovative. And we are accountable to our customers because we care about them and we are happy to be a part of our town’s success.”

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Shown above, the Waterloo Utilities team includes (front row): Steve Bergeson, Brent Mosher, Barry Sorenson, Mike Kitelinger, Nick Mueller, Tristen Furseth; (back row) Jake Fennin, Curtis Haberman, Kaitlin Sharpe, Joy Bisco (Not pictured: Ralph Vermig and Nick Hauptli)

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In the May edition of *Live Lines*, we included a listing of summertime festivals happening in the public power communities across Wisconsin in June, July, and August. In case you missed it, you can find the full list [here](#).

We learned of one additional festival that should have been included: **Black Earth Field Days** will take place Aug. 9-10.

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Upcoming training to highlight coaching as leadership skill

High performing leaders develop the skills and emotional intelligence to coach others effectively. Take the next step in your leadership journey by joining this one-day class focusing on the importance of effective coaching. Good coaches are seen as role models and need to understand those things that cause them to have frustration and how to channel their emotions productively. Participants will take away practical ideas they can apply to setting a good example and becoming a leader who gets the most from others. The class will be held in Mauston on Wednesday, Aug. 7. Registration and details about what you’ll learn are available here.

MEUW strategy session planned for late August in Mauston

MEUW’s Board of Directors will meet later this summer to review and consider changes to the association’s long-term strategic plan that was first adopted in 2019. A day-long session is planned for Tuesday, Aug. 27, at the Lodge At Mauston. The purpose of the meeting will be to evaluate progress on the current plan, which projected what MEUW could look like when the association marks its 100th anniversary in 2028. The planning will take into consideration how external factors might impact MEUW members and what services and offerings could be developed to strategically address them. All members are welcome to participate; please watch for full details.

Annual Accounting and Customer Service Seminar is Sept. 25

Registration will open in August for MEUW’s annual one-day seminar that brings together municipal electric utility staff with a focus on accounting and customer service topics. Attendees receive updates on regulatory and legislative issues that affect their utilities and compare best practices to improve their operations. MEUW’s Accounting & Customer Service Committee assists MEUW staff in putting together the day’s program to address timely topics. This year’s seminar is planned for Wednesday, Sept. 25, in Mauston.

“Everything Solar” seminar is available on-demand

As customer demand for distributed energy resources continues to increase, it’s even more important for utility operators to understand how those solar panels and other distributed generation resources impact their utility systems. Earlier this year, MEUW hosted the “Everything Solar” seminar to highlight interconnection rules, best practices, and other technical information. The training was led by Dave Krause, P.E. Portions of this training were recorded and are now available for those who were unable to attend in person. This seminar offers something for utility personnel of all skill levels and backgrounds. For information about individual or group purchase options, please call MEUW at (608) 837-2263.

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Village of Cadott plans to sell utility to neighboring co-op

Citing an “unsafe and unsustainable situation” with its aging electric system, officials in the Village of Cadott on May 22 announced plans to sell the village’s electric utility to Chippewa Valley Electric Cooperative (CVEC), which has been maintaining and operating Cadott’s system since 2017. CVEC is headquartered in Cornell.

A recent engineering study showed the electric system requires a $7.5 million investment to meet acceptable industry and safety standards, a cost Cadott's roughly 840 customers cannot carry alone. According to published news reports, Cadott has more than 38 accounts per mile of line, compared to CVEC which has about six. The two electric systems, which have adjacency and overlap in some places, would be able to serve as a backup to the other.

With the announcement, village officials now begin a multi-phase process to transfer Cadott's electric customers to become CVEC member-owners. That process includes a rate study to help the Public Service Commission (PSC) evaluate whether the plan is in the best interests of the public. If approved by the PSC, the plan would then be presented in a referendum to Cadott voters, which would likely occur sometime in 2025.

Focus on Energy achievements highlighted in new report

Utility customers continue to have high satisfaction with Focus on Energy, and most think more highly of their utility after participating in the statewide energy-efficiency program. These are some of the key takeaways in the recently released 2023 Evaluation Report prepared by the Cadmus Group for the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin. The report provides a comprehensive analysis of Focus on Energy’s performance in 2023, including energy saving achievements, cost-effectiveness, and opinions from business and residential utility customers that participated in the program.

The evaluation team reviewed the performance of 11 programs and 23 offerings that delivered energy savings in 2023 (for both the residential and nonresidential sectors) and calculated that Focus on Energy achieved over 22% more energy (combined electric and natural gas) savings than in 2022. Natural-gas savings outpaced electric, which is partially attributed to a significant increase in the number of rebated air-source heat pumps installed in residences.

The evaluation report also shows program participants expressed high satisfaction with Focus on Energy in 2023, which earned a 9.4 rating on a 10-point, where 10 is extremely satisfied and 0 is extremely dissatisfied. In addition, a significant majority of respondents said that their opinion of their utility improved because of the Focus offerings. This positive reaction should reinforce the importance of making sure utility customers are aware that Focus rebates and incentives are brought to them in partnership with their local utility.

Another important performance metric for the Focus program is cost-effectiveness. An analysis of the costs and benefits of the program included in the evaluation report showed that Focus on Energy returned $3.75 in benefits for every $1 spent in 2023. Benefits include avoided energy costs, utility bill savings, emissions reductions, and job creation. The report confirms that Focus on Energy continues to be a highly cost-effective program and good investment for Wisconsin utility customers.

The 2023 evaluation report is presented in three volumes with detailed findings for each Focus on Energy program and offering as well as details on the evaluation methodologies. All three volumes, and past annual evaluation reports, are available online here.
MEUW News Monitor
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Employment law workshop planned for Oct. 1

In partnership with Boardman Clark, MEUW is organizing a one-day workshop to focus on “people issues,” with a specific focus on employment laws relevant to municipalities. The daylong session — planned for Oct. 1 in Mauston — is intended as a refresher and will offer real-life examples of recent situations as well as open discussions about current topics. Among the subjects to be explored are workplace discrimination, family and medical leave, harassment, and employers’ obligation to maintain safe workplaces. There will be time to discuss all phases and aspects of hiring, training, managing, terminating, and litigating with respect to public sector employees. Registration will open soon.

Save the date for “District Dialogue” sessions planned across the state this October

MEUW will host a series of “District Dialogue” luncheons to encourage members to get together, receive updates about what’s happening, and take part in roundtable discussions about topics important to the membership. The sessions will be held in five communities around Wisconsin. Planned locations and dates are:

- Thursday, Oct. 3 — Richland Center
- Tuesday, Oct. 15 — Shawano
- Thursday, Oct. 17 — Rice Lake
- Tuesday, Oct. 22 — Lake Mills
- Tuesday, Oct. 29 — Black River Falls

While there is no cost to attend, pre-registration is required. Please watch for details about specific locations and sign-up in future communications from MEUW. Each session will begin at 10 a.m. and wrap up after lunch by about 1 p.m.

LIVELines Classifieds

MEUW is pleased to promote job openings with its member utilities across Wisconsin. New positions are regularly added to our website — check them out [here](#). Here are some current opportunities available:

- Oconomowoc Utilities
  Electric Line Technician Apprentice
- City of Evansville
  Apprentice Electric Line Worker
- Northeast Wisconsin Technical College
  Lab Technician — Electrical Power Distribution

When your utility is hiring, be sure to email the job posting to [office@meuw.org](mailto:office@meuw.org).

Are you receiving MEUW Safety Reminders?

To further efforts to support a strong safety culture, MEUW sends emailed Safety Reminders that can be used by our members in morning, tailgate, or other regular meetings. The emails cover a wide range of safety topics that can help reinforce existing safety practices and/or start discussions. If you’re interested in receiving these Safety Reminders, please let us [know](#).